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Budget plans or works of fiction?

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Democrats and Republicans have put together their dream budgets — political documents that are more like wish lists than usable road maps for the future of government spending.

Both have no chance of becoming law, but they do help explain the impasse over spending and debt in Washington.

The two plans — one by Republican Paul Ryan and the other by Democrat Patty Murray — aren't even apples and oranges. They're more like apples and bicycles.

Ryan's budget shoots to balance the budget in 10 years by slashing health care spending. Murray's plan, which Democrats outlined in bare-bones form Tuesday, seeks to lower deficits by raising \$1 trillion in new revenues and leaving out big entitlement changes but doesn't take on balancing the budget. That makes coming to an agreement look tough — if not impossible.

(Also on POLITICO: [Ryan's ax hits health programs hard](#))

Stacking the two budgets side by side, here are the key political takeaways.

Grand bargain? Good luck with that

President Barack Obama might like to talk about a grand bargain — and there's always a remote chance for a breakthrough — but the two documents rolled out this week don't make it look likely.

Democrats aren't trying to balance the budget, as Republicans are. In the Democrats' view, it's enough to reduce the deficit — and not even for its own sake, but to change spending priorities to help middle-class families and create jobs.

(Also on POLITICO: [Paul Ryan budget: Challenge to White House, DOA in Senate](#))

"While House Republicans are doubling down on the extreme budget that the American people already rejected, Senate Democrats are going to be working on a responsible pro-growth budget that reflects the values and priorities of middle-class families across the country," Murray said in a statement.

So this isn't Bill Clinton's second term again. At this point in his presidency, in 1997, he

had already signed on to the goal of a balanced budget. Republicans and Democrats had different ways to get there, but they shared the goal.

Now, Obama is facing a rebellion from liberal Democrats if he goes anywhere near a grand bargain, as he found out when he joined Senate Democrats for lunch at the Capitol on Tuesday.

“We don’t want to start whacking away at Social Security ... or Medicare, things like that” when there are other ways to keep them solvent besides cutting benefits, Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) told reporters after the meeting. “So we’re cautioning him: Be careful about this grand bargain.”

The deficit-reduction goals aren’t that close, either. Ryan wants to cut spending by \$4.6 trillion over the next 10 years. Murray wants to reduce the deficit by \$1.9 trillion, and only half, \$975 billion, would be through spending cuts. The other \$975 billion would be through tax revenues.

But that’s enough, Murray says, to achieve the original goal of \$4 trillion in deficit reduction that the Simpson-Bowles fiscal commission proposed, since \$2.4 trillion has already been accomplished, though that includes sequestration.

Suspend disbelief

Both parties had to ignore reality to write their budget.

For Republicans, Obamacare isn’t the law of the land. In Ryan’s world, Obamacare is just as repealable as it was in the heady early days of 2011.

Likewise, Murray’s budget doesn’t make adjustments for the post-fiscal cliff world, in which Obama has already spent political capital on winning \$600 billion in tax increases from Republicans.

But at a news conference Tuesday morning, Ryan insisted the budget ought to be a statement of priorities — and he says a balanced budget, complete with Obamacare repeal, is what the House Republican majority wants.

“The election didn’t go our way. Believe me, I know what that feels like. So that means we surrender our principles? That means we stop believing what we believe in?” Ryan asked.

Members: Thanks for the tough votes

Ryan never makes it easy for his House Republican colleagues to take the budget vote, and this year will be no exception. Once again, they’ll have to defend his plan to change Medicare into a program of limited subsidies to buy private insurance or traditional Medicare coverage, as well as his plans to cut Medicaid and food stamps by turning them into block grants.

But red-state Democrats in the Senate aren’t necessarily going to be thrilled with the Murray budget, either. How is “trillion dollar tax hike” going to sound in their opponents’

attack ads next year?

Parties ready attack ads

Democratic and Republican operatives, of course, are getting ready to blast away at the budgets and any lawmaker who votes for them. Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Chairman Steve Israel charged in a statement Tuesday that “Tea party Republicans are tripling down on a radical plan that demands seniors pay more for Medicare instead of ending tax breaks for corporate special interests and Big Oil companies.” Never mind that the last Ryan budget didn’t help the Democrats win back the House, there’s always 2014.

And though it’s been awhile, every Senate vote on a budget resolution becomes a target-rich environment for the party committees — just because it leads to a “vote-a-rama” in which each side forces the other to take tough votes.

“For over 1,400 days, Democrats refused to produce a budget to avoid making tough decisions, taking controversial votes, and being held accountable,” National Republican Senatorial Committee spokesman Brad Dayspring wrote in an email to POLITICO Tuesday.

“Since Democratic senators have refused to do their job, we will absolutely make sure voters know their senators’ liberal priorities and how they voted, whether it’s to raise taxes, increase spending or whatever else these votes reveal.”

Social Security: Don’t even think about it

Social Security has usually been a separate conversation for Republicans and Democrats, since it isn’t considered part of the budget and it’s not in imminent danger: Its trust fund is supposed to be solvent until 2033. But it’s still telling that Ryan didn’t include any Social Security-related proposals in his plan — not even “chained CPI,” the updated formula for paying benefits that Obama has tentatively offered to Republicans.

With no Ryan proposal on Social Security and Senate Democrats virtually certain to leave the program untouched, the only way it could become part of a later budget deal would be if Obama brings it up himself.

Harkin said he and Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) urged Obama to stay away from “chained CPI,” but they weren’t pleased with what they heard. Obama’s response, Harkin said with a grin, was: “Basically, things are open for negotiation.”

And liberal activists — aware that Obama has put “chained CPI” on the table before — warned him not to even think about it.

“Just as progressives defeated President Bush’s attempts to privatize Social Security at the beginning of his second term, progressives will mobilize to defeat any attempt by

President Obama to cut Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid benefits,” Adam Green, co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, said in a statement Tuesday as Obama headed to Capitol Hill for the lunch. “Democrats across this country did not donate

millions of dollars, knock on thousands of doors and volunteer countless hours to send Democrats to Washington to dismantle key parts of the New Deal.”

Ryan: No gimmicks — but what about Obamacare repeal?

Ryan insisted his plan would balance the budget with “no gimmicks” — meaning he wouldn’t do things like claim savings from drawing down U.S. forces from Afghanistan.

There’s just one catch: Ryan gets a lot of money — \$1.8 trillion — by assuming the repeal of Obamacare. It’s not going to happen with Obama back in the White House, of course, as even most House Republicans have acknowledged: They’ve shelved all of their repeal bills except for a few token efforts. But Ryan can’t make his math work without it.

Even he acknowledges that. “We will never be able to balance the budget if you keep Obamacare going, because Obamacare is a fiscal train wreck,” Ryan said Tuesday.

Ryan’s aides, however, insist that’s not a gimmick, it’s a policy change that Republicans want to advance. The war savings that Democrats would use is a gimmick, they say, because it doesn’t require any actual change in policy: The troops are coming home anyway.

“You can’t claim as ‘savings’ money that nobody is proposing to spend,” said Ryan spokesman William Allison. “House Republicans are proposing to repeal Obamacare. That is money that Democrats want to spend. That is money that we don’t want to spend. So we propose to repeal it and would of course claim savings from this policy proposal.”

Murray to Obama: Your move on entitlements

Murray is planning \$493 billion in domestic savings, including \$275 billion in health care savings. That may sound like a lot, but it’s nothing compared with Ryan’s \$129 billion in Medicare cuts and \$756 billion in savings from Medicaid and other health care programs.

That’s a pretty good indication that Senate Democrats aren’t thinking of big changes to Medicare, like raising the eligibility age or any of the other entitlement programs. The liberal Center for American Progress has already outlined ways to save \$385 billion — even more than Murray’s target — without making any of those changes. And Democrats say they’re going to achieve their savings without shifting costs to seniors — which is usually their way of ruling out not just Ryan’s plans but other changes like a higher eligibility age.

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